



**North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services  
Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse  
Services**

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Michael F. Easley, Governor  
Carmen Hooker Odom, Secretary

Michael Moseley, Director

August 30, 2004

**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Legislative Oversight Committee Members  
MH/DD/SAS Commission  
Consumer/Family Advisory Committee Chairs  
Advocacy Organizations and Groups  
North Carolina Association of County Commissioners  
County Managers  
County Manager Chairs  
North Carolina Council of Community Programs  
State Facility Directors  
Area Program Directors  
Area Program Board Chairs  
Provider Organizations  
MH/DD/SAS Professional Organizations and Groups  
MH/DD/SAS Stakeholder Organizations and Groups  
Other MH/DD/SAS Stakeholders

**From:** Mike Moseley

**Re:** Communication Bulletin # 027  
Communications Plan



Attached you will find the Division's strategic communications plan. The plan encompasses long term strategies as well as the Division's first annual plan. The plan is intended to evolve over time.

The purpose of the communication plan is to provide an overall framework for planning, constructing and managing the wide variety of communications that occur within the public mental health/developmental disabilities/substance abuse service system. It addresses audiences, messages, media and ongoing evaluation. The plan helps to ensure that the Division provides relevant, accurate, consistent information throughout the system.

cc: Carmen Hooker Odom  
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**North Carolina Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services**

# COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

2004-2005

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## PURPOSE

Communication is one of the most critical aspects of management during the process of planning, change or reform within the organization. Staff and other stakeholders should understand the basis for the change, as well as the methods used to achieve the proposed outcomes. Successful and effective communication is planned, constructed and managed. The purpose of the communication plan is to provide an overall framework for planning, constructing and managing the wide variety of communications that occur within the public mental health/developmental disabilities/substance abuse service system. It addresses audiences, messages, media and ongoing evaluation. The plan helps to ensure that the Division provides relevant, accurate, consistent information throughout the system.

## INTRODUCTION

As North Carolina's reform of mental health, developmental disabilities, and substance abuse services continues, consumers and other stakeholders need to understand the changes that are rapidly being implemented. This massive overhaul of a statewide services/supports delivery system places an increasing emphasis on the need for effective communications. Communications must be planned and must be targeted to audiences that have specific needs for different kinds of messages presented in ways most accessible to them.

*"Communications is much less about the technology or medium chosen as a vehicle and more about advancing the cause of your organization. An effective communications strategy reflects your organization's mission, goals and objectives, and is well integrated into daily operations. It requires a clear articulation of audience, clarity of message, and choice of media platform. It also consists of an ongoing feedback relationship between planning and evaluation."*

*<http://www.benton.org/>*

Implementation of this Communications Plan will:

- Identify long-term goals.
- Provide focus for day-to-day activities.
- Set priorities.
- Inform stakeholders.

Ultimately, achieving these results is intended to produce positive outcomes for consumers through the creation of a better-informed public.

## Communication Methods

The Division will employ multiple media in communicating its message.

### Print

Most often people think of things like brochures, flyers, newsletters, fact sheets and newspapers when thinking about print documents. It is important to understand that all forms of an agency's print communications represent an opportunity to communicate effectively - or poorly - with its audiences. Things like memos, letters, reports, studies, and manuals are also

opportunities to further the agency's mission by appropriately informing one or more audiences. All communications should be written in the clearest, jargon-free language possible, and, if necessary, multiple formats should be created for each target audience.

## **Presentations**

Face-to-face presentations have long been a staple for getting a targeted message to an audience. They allow for interaction between presenter and audience. They also put a *face* to the agency and its initiatives. This is very important especially when trying to develop positive community relationships.

## **Mass Media**

Mass media such as radio, TV, and newspapers can be important ways to communicate effectively on a large and/or community scale. Air time and print space can be purchased or can be the result of providing information that the media deem newsworthy for their particular audiences. Newsworthiness increases if there is a local tie-in to the content of the material.

## **Electronic**

### **The Internet and E-mail**

The Internet and e-mail are most assuredly the cheapest and quickest ways to communicate with audiences, most of which are increasingly using them.

The ability to access and use the Internet in this information age is becoming more and more critical as a way to stay informed about important issues and to be part of communities. Unfortunately, as of now, people with disabilities are less likely to have access to the Internet and e-mail than other segments of society. They are about half as likely to have access as those without a disability, and three years ago, about 20% of them actually used the Internet. This will be more and more of a problem for people with disabilities as reliance on these media grows.

*"The rapid uptake of new technologies is occurring among most groups of Americans, regardless of income, education, race or ethnicity, location, age, or gender, suggesting that digital inclusion is a realizable goal. Groups that have traditionally been digital have nots are now making dramatic gains...."*

People with disabilities risk continued exclusion from communities if they do not have access to this medium. They need to be able to use e-mail and to access the web. Schools, libraries, and other public access points increasingly serve people who do not have access at home.<sup>1</sup>

The internet and e-mail have also become standard business processes. Agencies doing business in the public system should have this capability.

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<sup>1</sup> "Falling Through the Net: Toward Digital Inclusion," UCLA's Center for Communications Policy

## Videos, CDs, DVDs

These types of communication are highly portable and are available whenever the user wants to access them. These are very important concepts when considering how to reach a variety of audiences throughout the state.

## Communications Process

Overall there are three phases in the communication management process. They are to prepare, manage and reinforce communications strategies. Strategies are systematic plans of action.

### 1. Prepare a Plan of Communication Strategies

This includes:

- Analyzing needs – who needs to know what?
- Defining audiences – what groups or individuals need to be targeted?
- Determining the message – what needs to be communicated??
- Determining delivery methods – what are the best media to get a communication to an audience? When should this be done?

*"It is necessary, but not sufficient, to know what you want to say. You also have to know how your audience hears your words and responds to your images. So you must survey how different audiences understand your message when you use different approaches. After you discover the most convincing way of stating your message, you can (deliver)...the message."*

*Denis Hayes, Bullitt Foundation*

2. Manage Communication Strategies—Identify long-term goals and implement annual plans aimed at achieving those goals.

3. Reinforce Communication Strategies—Evaluate strengths and weaknesses of plans. Take corrective action or enhance and celebrate achievements. Gathering both quantitative<sup>2</sup> data and qualitative<sup>3</sup> data is important. It's essential to know that the process is working as well as whether the communications are creating intended outcomes.

## Stakeholders or Targeted Audiences

The identification of targeted audiences from among identified stakeholders is a key component of a communications plan. Stakeholders are "individuals or groups with an interest in the success of an organization in delivering intended results and maintaining the viability of the

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<sup>2</sup> Quantitative data - "Numeric information that includes things like personal income, amount of time, or a rating of an opinion on a scale from 1 to 5. Even things that you do not think of as quantitative, like feelings, can be collected using numbers if you create scales to measure them. Quantitative data is used with closed-ended questions, where users are given a limited set of possible answers to a question." (Google)

<sup>3</sup> Qualitative data - "A record of thoughts, observations, opinions, or words. Qualitative data typically comes from asking open-ended questions to which the answers are not limited by a set of choices or a scale. Examples of qualitative data include answers to questions such as "How can the program be improved?" (Google)

organization's products and services. Stakeholders influence programs, products, and services."<sup>4</sup> As such, stakeholders become the various audiences to be communicated with according to their roles in the system. Different audiences require different methods of communicating with them. Communication is not a one-size-fits-all activity. Communication intensity levels can be seen as:

1. General information modalities that may include brochures, use of the mass media, flyers, the web, brief presentations, etc.
2. Targeted information modalities that may include complex presentations in person, on the web, on CD and on video as well as products from #1 above.

Efforts must be made to match communications with the particular audience. A system needs to be implemented that looks at each issue and audience or stakeholder group to determine what they need to know and the intensity of communication, education and training they require.

## **Long-Range Planning**

### **Guiding Principles**

1. Successful communication is accomplished through productive and collaborative relationships with stakeholders. Stakeholder group members, especially consumers and families, will help craft ongoing communication strategies and materials.
2. A full range of communication efforts needs to be in place and targeted to outcomes for individual groups of stakeholders or audiences.
3. Good communication requires careful planning and focus.
4. System reform offers an opportunity to reshape public thinking about individuals with disabilities and their services and supports.
5. Efforts to communicate with minorities need to be enhanced. Because of the fairly recent increase in population numbers, this is especially true for Spanish-speaking people. Targeting these audiences can help to promote statewide cultural competence through style, content, language, and function of public materials.

### **Expected Outcomes**

1. Identified audiences understand, and can explain reform outcomes; can define who will get services/supports as well as impact/options for those who will not qualify for services.
2. Identified audiences have access to information about reform, provided in ways that are most clear to them.

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<sup>4</sup> Google



3. Identified audiences have access to ongoing methods for giving feedback about issues important to them. Feedback will be used to evaluate communications and to make needed changes.

## **2004-05 Plan**

### **Goals**

1. Establish a process for targeting communications to particular audiences, including methods to enhance communication efforts that reach culturally diverse groups statewide.
2. Expand public awareness of reform and the value of the public mh/dd/sa system through the use of commercial and public media outlets as well as other state-of-the-art technologies.
3. Develop and lead in efforts addressing the issue of public awareness initiatives aimed at reducing stigma toward people with disabilities.
4. Develop methods to increase web use by consumers and their families.

### **Targeting the Message to the Audience**

By October, 2004, the Division will identify stakeholder audiences for regular communication, determine the most constructive methodologies to reach those audiences on an ongoing basis, and identify the resources needed to accomplish the task.

### **Addressing Stigma**

The Division is participating in a 3-year federal pilot project aimed at reducing the stigma of mental illness and prejudices statewide. The Elimination of Barriers Initiative (EBI), is being funded by The Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Lessons learned will be applied to all communication efforts for all disability groups.

In FY 04-05, on a timetable identified by the federal managers of the project, the Division will provide two target audiences with messages aimed at changing their perceptions of people with mental illness. The audiences are staff in selected high schools and the general public.

### **Achieving Cultural Competence**

In FY 03-04, the NC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) launched a project to improve cultural competence in the public mh/dd/sas system. As a first step, focus groups were organized in March 2004. By December 2004, the Division will have reviewed recommendations made by the focus groups and developed a plan for increasing cultural competence among the LMEs, providers, Division staff and stakeholders.

## **Promoting Awareness**

Division has developed and implemented a system to include on its website the promotion of national mental health, developmental disabilities, and substance abuse observances—days, weeks, or months devoted to particular concerns. This observance website was officially launched in May 2004 to observe National Mental Health Month. Other high profile observances in 2004 will include National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (September), Suicide Prevention Week (September 5-11), National Down Syndrome Awareness Month (October), Mental Illness Awareness Week (October 3-9), and National Depression Screening Day (October 7). In 2005, the website promotion will include Birth Defects Prevention Month (January), National Eating Disorders Awareness Week (February), Mental Retardation Awareness Month (March), and Alcohol Awareness Month (April).

Generally, sponsoring organizations plan and schedule activities in conjunction with these observances. The calendar includes dates, activity details and contact information of organizers who are using these special times to sponsor events that promote awareness of mental health/developmental disabilities/substance abuse services and/or focus on prevention and treatment. Consequently, the calendar acts as a clearinghouse of information to consumers and families, system professionals, teachers, community groups and other concerned individuals. In addition to this statewide posting, local management entities are sent “drop-in” media releases that can be specifically tailored to promote their specific community activities. North Carolina Governor Michael Easley is being asked to sign proclamations that declare each observance as official and important.

## **Responding to Media**

In coordination with the Department of Health and Human Services Public Affairs Office, the Communications Team will proactively respond in writing to local and statewide coverage, editorials and other public issues concerning the state of mental health, developmental disabilities and substance abuse in North Carolina.

## **Using the Internet**

By October 2004, the Communications Team will make recommendations to management for increasing web availability and use by consumers and families.

## **Keeping up with Stakeholder Contact Information**

By December 2004, the Division will implement a central office system for maintaining and updating contact information for targeted audiences. The system, a relational information database of stakeholders, organizations and individuals interested in receiving Division communications, will be used by staff trained in its use.

### **Creating Expectations for Written Documents**

By August 2004, the Communications and Training Team will provide central office staff with a style sheet for writing documents that meet established standards for clarity and consistency.

### **Enhancing Communication Efforts among Division staff**

(i.e. central office and state operated facility personnel)

By January 2005, the Communications Team will conduct two focus groups (state facility and central office) seeking ways to improve communications in both directions. From this, the Team will produce written recommendations for approval by the Executive Leadership Team (ELT).

### **Town Meetings**

To advance the Division's message about reform, the members of the executive leadership team will participate in four town meetings throughout the state. They will occur in the eastern, north central, south central and western parts of the state. The events will be held in October 2004 and February, May and August 2005. These events will be coordinated with the local managing entities in each area and will be widely publicized.